

## **Who are you?**

The concept of culture has been in existence since the conception of humanity. However, as the world changes socially, politically, and geographically, cultures alter and adapt in order to survive. This process of adapting can be difficult at times. These difficult times often occur when national culture and local culture conflict. On the other hand, there are many times when local cultures are preserved by national cultures. Jose Antonio Burciaga, Chicano artist, poet, and writer, explores these occurrences in his literature.

Jose Antonio Burciaga was an influential icon in Chicano literature. Burciaga was an avid writer who pursued his Chicano identity. In his writings, he often brought up social issues that became, and still are, an obstacle for chicanos in everyday life. However, his writings did much more than simply complain about the hardships Chicanos face in American society. Through pieces like “Whats in a Spanish Name”, “Spilling the Beans”, and even “The Honorable Senator Ralph W. Yarborough”, Burciaga successfully contributed to the creation of an imagined community, and highlighted his local culture. This imagined communities facilitate in our analysis of local and national cultures.

In “Whats in a Spanish Name”, Burciaga recalls upon his childhood years in an American grade school. Growing up in El Paso, Texas, Burciaga was surrounded by a local culture that contained many characteristics of their latino heritage. This culture differed drastically from his surrounding national culture. For example, Burciaga’s grade school established a strict rule that English is the only permitted language in his school. The punishment for defying the obnoxious principle consisted of “ paddling, ridicule, and writing “I shall not speak Spanish in school” a hundred times”. Burciaga expresses his struggle with this rule since he was taught Spanish be-

fore English. This is the perfect example of local vs national culture. Burciaga's local culture, (in this case his family) was responsible for Spanish being Burciaga's first language. However his national culture (in this case the school... which was and still is federally owned) combated these influences of his local culture with harsh restrictions and punishments. This displays how local vs national culture are constantly in correlation. In this instance, the national culture was attempting to eliminate or at the very least belittle the local culture.

In the same piece of literature by Burciaga, he explains how a local culture can conflict and collide with another local culture. Burciaga learned of this possibility when he came along a Texas Town named Buda. After "not too much asking around" he learned "the name was Viuda, which is Spanish for widow". After the realization that a "monolingual Texan just didn't know any better and wrote it down just the way he heard it", Burciaga realized there are many instances in which english words and labels stem from the Spanish language. However, this was not only the realization that there is a lazy Texan out there who does his job with half his ass. It was the realization that this Texan had his own local culture that differentiated from Burciaga's local culture even though they were in the same geographical location. This is possible due to the fact that Burciaga and the lackadaisical texan are part of completely separate imagined communities.

The term imagined community was coined by Benedict Anderson in 1983. Anderson defined the concept as "socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group." Understanding this concept is vital for the evaluation of local cultures. Jose Antonio Burciaga fully comprehended this idea and implemented it into his writings. An example of this implementation can be seen in one of Burciaga's satirical pieces,

“Spilling the beans”. In this piece Burciaga calls upon an imagined community of those who eat beans. However, Burciaga displays that there can be various imagined communities revolving around “beans”. This is due to the existence of various local cultures. For instance, the Chicano Culture’s (local culture) imagined community of beans are for those which beans mean “eat them or nada”. While the Texan Culture (local culture) imagined community are for those who immediately think of Texan U.S. astronaut Alan Lavern Bean (“piloted the lunar module Intrepid on the Apollo 12 mission”) when hearing the word bean. It is then the objective of the national culture to incorporate or exclude the imagined communities of the local cultures in the national culture. This objective can be seen in the previous example given of the rules at Burciaga’s childhood grade school. However, just because a local culture has been rejected by one national culture does not mean it will be rejected by another.

In “Spilling the Beans”, Burciaga states “the beans that will spill from this book are beans that have boiled for over 500 years.” Burciaga is using beans as a metaphor for his culture. He is declaring that his current local culture has been around for over 500 years. How is this possible if the United States was found on July 4 1776? It is because Burciaga’s local Chicano culture stemmed from the national culture of Mexico (Mexico City was founded in 1430). Therefore, after the treaty of Guadalupe in 1848, the Chicano culture became a local culture of America but still remains part of the national culture of Mexico. With this information, we begin to learn that without the assistance of national culture, it is difficult to preserve a local culture or imagined community. This is seen in Burciaga’s piece, “The Honorable Senator Ralph W. Yarborough”.

In “The Honorable Senator Ralph W. Yarborough”, Burciaga explores the impact that imagined communities can have on national culture. This excerpt takes place in 1964 during the

time period of the Cold War (1947-1991). Burciaga attempts to reach out to Senator Ralph W. Yarborough, famous for the introduction of the Cold War G.I. Bill. Burciaga conducts a well written letter that encompasses the lack of financial assistance for minorities or Cold War Veterans. Burciaga, being both, was struggling. His local culture and imagined community (Chicano's and Cold War Veterans) were being ignored by the national community (U.S. Federal Government). This imagined community (Cold War Veterans) that Burciaga is a part of is seen through his statement "My deep interest in this bill is shared by thousands of other young men." These local cultures and imagined communities often take it upon themselves to make a name for themselves. However without the help of the national culture, it is nearly impossible.

Senator Yarborough could be considered as an outlet for the local cultures that were considered minorities. He fought for those who couldn't fight for themselves. This happens many times in local and national cultures. The national culture simply overthrows local cultures with overwhelming odds and eliminates its chance for survival. Being part of an imagined community one has a certain sense of pride, or feeling of duty, to aid in the obstacles their community faces. Therefore, to some extent, Senator Yarborough was part of many imagined communities. "He helped co-sponsor the Higher Education Act of 1965". Yarborough took part in the imagined community of education. He also facilitated the "Bilingual Education Act", and the "Minimum Wage Law". The senator was quoted "I not only attended meetings and studied the problem of Spanish speaking children, but I had seen the language barriers and resulting poverty first hand." This shows why he aided in the Minimum Wage Law and Bilingual Education Act. It is because he felt that he was a part of these cultures imagined communities. Therefore he took it upon himself to fight for the local cultures since he had influence in the national culture.

In conclusion, local and national cultures differ drastically in definition. However, similar to the nature vs nurture argument, they correlate constantly with one another. This analyzation can be seen through Jose Antonio Burciaga's literature. In pieces like "Whats in a Spanish Name", "Spilling the Beans", and "The Honorable Senator Ralph W. Yarborough", Burciaga investigates connections between local and nation cultures. These connections revolve around imagined communities that can be established through writings like Chicano literature. At times, national culture will overwhelm local culture. On other occurrences, the national culture will encourage the activities and imagined communities of the local cultures.